

The Calloused Digit

by

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The Study Of The History Of The End Of The World, Part 2

Jeroslav Pelikan is quoted as saying, “Apocalypticism ... was the mother of all Christian theology. (Kyle 32).” With technological explanations provided in the attempt to understand many of the obtuse symbols detailed in the eschatological portions of Scripture, it can be easy to assume that preoccupation with the End Times and the return of Christ are new phenomena some might describe as afflicting contemporary believers. However, this sense of anticipation has been a part of Christianity since its earliest days. And yet that perspective was also an inheritance bequeathed to the faith as a result of it fulfilling the promises and claims of ancient Judaism.

The West's fascination with End Times speculation can be traced to the tumultuous religious melting pot and crossroads of the Mediterranean world. Though steeped more in a cyclical philosophy of history than their monotheistic Hebrew counterparts, a number of Greek thinkers such as the Stoic Zeno believed that the world would be violently destroyed and begun anew. The Zoroastrians of Persia adhered to an eschatology similar in its broad outline (even if not in specifics) to that of Christianity in that this dualistic system believed that the god of light would remove the good people from the world before it was destroyed with molten metal and restored to sinless perfection.

It is argued by scholars of textual higher criticism that the Israelites did not possess a detailed cosmology of the Afterlife until coming into contact with the Zoroastrians during the time of the Babylonian captivity. Exposure to these ideas coupled with the despair of such a national calamity inspired the development of Jewish apocalyptic literature such as the Books of Ezekiel and Daniel. Those holding to Scripture as divinely inspired would respond that the Israelites should not be accused of cultural misappropriation for allegedly

co-opting the eschatology of the Zoroastrians. Such an interpretation would rather consider it a coincidence of divine fortuitousness for the Zoroastrian mystics and contemplatives to have come so close to the truth without the benefit of direct inspirational revelation.

Perhaps the most detailed portion of the Old Testament considered apocalyptic in nature is found in the Book of Daniel. Beginning in chapter 7 and onward through 12, a number of interpretations have been developed by theologians and Bible scholars in the attempt to understand the potentially confusing and most certainly disturbing imagery. Those of a liberal persuasion tend to view the text as more historical in nature. The narrative, such scholars contend, was not written towards the end of the Babylonian exile. Instead the author was actually writing following the desolation of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes in such a way so as to make those events sound as if they were yet to transpire within the context of the passage (Thompson, 17).

The futurist interpretation of the Book of Daniel, to which a significant number of Evangelical eschatological theologians adhere, contends that the events described in the text were yet to have taken place at the time they were actually written about by the eponymous Daniel. These prophecies in large part pertain to a series of empires that were yet to come. The empires were in turn symbolically depicted as a series of beasts as well as to what segment and metal they corresponded to on a great statue in a vision by Nebuchadnezzar as interpreted by Daniel. Of particular interest to students of the End Times is the description of the fourth beast. For adorning the fourth beast was a living horn representing a fierce king that would speak blasphemous things against God and make war against the saints. Historicists have traditionally

interpreted this to be Antiochus Epiphanes. However, a number holding to the futurist school of interpretation believe this also to be a warning regarding the Antichrist foretold to appear slightly before the Second Advent.

The academic elite might attempt to downplay the apocalyptic nature of the Old Testament by insisting that what appear to be predicted events actually transpired prior to being written down. However, the prophetic nature of the New Testament cannot be as easily denied. Beginning in the Gospels (particularly in the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24-25), Christ Himself warns of signs such as the kingdoms that will rise against kingdoms and the earthquakes that will take place in diverse places. The message continues well into the Epistles that establish the doctrinal parameters of the church that formed shortly after Christ's resurrection.

Paul warns in the Epistles to the Thessalonians of the man of sin to be revealed and in I Corinthians 15 that Christ will appear in the twinkling of an eye. However, this emphasis upon the End Times was not particularly confined to a single Apostle. In II Peter 3, the believer is told that the present Earth will be consumed in a fervent heat.

The Apostle that perhaps dealt the most extensively with the End Times was none other than John the Beloved. It is in his epistles that the enigmatic Son of Perdition is referred to openly as the Antichrist. John went on to reveal the demonic nature of that figure as well as describe other aspects of the End Times in the Book of Revelation (interestingly enough also known as "the Apocalypse"). Like its counterpart the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament, the symbolism depicted within Revelation is so overwhelming for the human mind to grasp that the attempt to understand the text has spawned a number of conflicting interpretations. Similar to the interpretations of the Book of Daniel, these viewpoints are the historian, the idealist, the futurist and the preterist (Kyle, 37).

The idealist interprets the Book of Revelation as merely an allegory of the struggle between good and evil intended to comfort the believer irrespective of their circumstances by reminding that Christ is ultimately triumphant. The preterist believes that Revelation was intended for the first

century church undergoing persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire, assuring believers in that day that their persecution would come to an end. The historian is somewhat more eschatological in its interpretation in that the viewpoint sees Revelation as predicting the broad forecast of church history rather than focused upon events immediately preceding Christ's return. The futurist is the interpretative viewpoint the most eschatologically apocalyptic in that those holding to the perspective contend that the symbolic descriptions contained within the narrative are prophecies regarding events to take place during a time of judgment immediately prior to Christ's return.

All of the prophecies to be considered divinely inspired are found within the corpus of the canonical Old and New Testaments. However, since the earliest days of the church, that has not stopped those gripped with a fascination for the events predicted to take place towards the end of the age from elaborating upon these in the hopes of better understanding what are admittedly complicated texts. Sometimes this speculation has proven helpful. More often than not, such has resulted in additional confusion, even occasionally crossing the theological line into outright error.

With Jesus expected to return shortly and in light of the sporadic yet brutal persecution of Christians on the part of the Roman Empire, one of the earliest (and perhaps most prominent) temptations in regards to eschatological studies was date setting. Extrapolating from II Peter 3:8 that a thousand years are as a day with the Lord and in light of the seven days of creation detailed in the Book of Genesis, it became a popular belief that Jesus would return around the year 6,000 which was believed to be around the time theologians such as Hippolytus and Irenaeus of Lyons were making such predictions (Abanes, 283).

Unfortunately, such apocalyptic speculation did not confine itself to the theologian's study. The self-proclaimed prophet Montanus exuded such enthusiasm that he spawned his own movement, Montanism (of course). It was his message that the return of Christ was so imminent that believers no longer found themselves in the Church Age but rather in the Age of the Spirit. As such, no longer were intermediary institutions such as the organized

church or even Scripture necessary for the faithful to discern the will of God. Rather, such knowledge was available through the direct imputation of the Holy Spirit to any that believed.

Those overseeing the Bride of Christ realized that they needed to get the situation under control. Belief in Christ's return was no doubt an indisputable component of the Christian message. However, with the rise of Constantine, the empire had declared a truce with the church to the point where widespread persecution not only came to an end but Christianity ended up becoming the official state religion. That ended up opening another can of worms as to what was to be done with those that did not believe as those in authority thought they ought. As the church grew more comfortable and came to the conclusion that this life was not so bad after all with the hope that Jesus would still one day come but just not right now, the foremost thinkers in all of Christianity were charged with devising ways to subtly shift establishment theologies underlying eschatological speculation. This new outlook tended to favor the allegorical interpretation of the

Alexandrian theologians such as Origen over the more literalist scholars of Ephesus and Antioch (Kyle, 38). For example, Eusebius of Caesarea denied that Christ would return to establish an earthly kingdom. Instead, he argued in his Ecclesiastical History that history up until that point had been working to establish a truly Christian empire not so much under Christ but rather directly governed by Constantine.

The thinker doing the most to divert the church away from its premillennial footing was Augustine of Hippo. As an admirer of Plato, Augustine was repulsed by the idea of a materialist millennium where a variety of carnal pleasures could be enjoyed. Instead in The City Of God, Augustine held that what the millennium symbolized in the Book of Revelation was actually the period of history following Christ's Resurrection as the teaching of this miraculous event spread throughout the world. Such a doctrine that downplayed the notion of a literal millennium but not denying the implications of the Scriptural text outright came to be known as amillennialism.

Church Insinuates Those Unwilling To Become Members Might Be Asked To Leave

A church is considering implementing a program modeled by another church where those attending for six months would be required to sit down for a discussion with a pastor for the purposes of strongarming long term visitors into membership. Such a meeting might prove fruitful for those wanting one.

But what if one does not want one or where after words you still see little need for membership since the congregation is mostly an obey the pastor or

else sort of place and that those not in the ranks of the clergy are of limited value in the first place?

Is one going to get slapped with a restraining order where you can't set foot on the premises for the purposes of quiet observation?

For those that like to participate in confrontational drama, that might make for an interesting media story.

Personally, if things are getting to this point, I eventually just won't be going back.

Pastor Asserts As Much Claim To Tuesday Evening As Sunday Morning

A pastor remarked that Tuesday night visitation ought to be as popular as Sunday morning church.

When you become a Christian in general and a church member in particular, most of the time you acquiesce to the claim that organized religion has assessed on your time on Sunday mornings.

An argument can be made that such a precedent was set to an extent by certain understandings of Scripture and solidified by the practice of tradition.

However, no such obligation exists to show up Tuesday evenings because a particular pastor has decided to fill a gap of time between Sunday and midweek Bible study or prayer meeting.

Most are able to attend Sunday morning services because the culture grants a considerable amount of free time both before and after the primary worship service. No similar blocks of time bracket Tuesday evening visitation, a religious endeavor specifically called for

nowhere in the pages of Scripture in terms of being a ritualized compulsory observation.

This activity is held right on the tail end of what would be considered a regular work day.

As such, what tasks are pastors and other religious laborers required to participate in that are more in your

area of expertise not at a time of their particular choosing but rather one you bark out as an arbitrary order after completing a task particularly tiresome from their own vocation?

Wishing Biden Nothing One Way Or The Other

Avowed Plague Cult zealot Joe Biden has contracted the venerated pestilence.

At the zenith of the respiratory boutade, the Autarch conspired to restrict the availability of particular curatives in order to corral the population towards the injectable genetic therapies preferred by elite technocrats and to punish individuals refusing to acquiesce with the likelihood of grave illness and possibly even death.

Bet during the grips of his illness no physician wheeled Biden to the hospital entrance and had him ejected from the premises as pleurisy filled his lungs, essentially telling him desiccated bowel movement because of his inoculation status.

As such, I am gripped with profound indifference regarding his potential recovery.

Hit & Run Commentary

A pastor condemned Hallmark movies because the films urge people to follow their hearts. With the exception of the ones now aimed at gays and I am not aware if any advocated getting out of marriages that were not abusive but that lost their spark, given the way that the plots are contrived what is so wrong with that as advice in a love story? Would it be preferable if these stories were about marriages founded on the basis of asset acquisition? It's not like these are the *Lord of the Rings* or *Star Trek* with an epic quest or perplexing ethical dilemma to resolve.

In the opening of a sermon, a pastor remarked that if one did not bring a Bible, it would be acceptable for this week to use the pew Bible. However, next week one had better bring their own. To clarify that this was not necessarily a joke, his next remark insinuated that those that come to church without a Bible did not have a good testimony (the allegation

you hurl at someone when you really can't accuse them of doing anything specifically wrong). Thus, it's not so much about internalizing the contents of divine revelation but rather about at best putting on a show or at the most base feeling forced to comply with herd conformity

Biden is promising access to human pesticides for those seeking abortions. That is more than he did for those that suffered from the Plague. The autarch restricted the supply of monoclonal antibodies, making it difficult to obtain the substance especially if one had not submitted to the sect's injectable alchemy.

If those wearing slave muzzles all day were really worried about exposure to the sacredotal pathogen, wouldn't they eat alone in isolated corners corners of a nearly empty building rather than as a trio around a table seated nearly shoulder to shoulder?

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